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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

All communications should be addressed to ALEXANDER FULLERTON, 144 Madison Avenue, New York.

FOR PARAGRAPHS UNDER THE WORD "ANS." THE EDITOR IS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

March, 1894.

QUESTION CCLXXXIV.

How it is that Bible believers can doubt or deny the existence of the Masters of Wisdom, I cannot clearly comprehend. They all claim attributes of Mastership for every Bible author and for many Bible characters. They ever claim the authority, the superior wisdom, the inspiration by God of those same authors and characters as the foundation of their faith. And I believe that that same authority gives some account of a certain school of the Prophets whose exclusiveness was not unlike that of the Masters of our own day. And I believe that that same authority gives some account of a certain class of Masters, declared too to be "without beginning of days or end of years". This class of Masters appeared among the people twice in four thousand years "from the beginning". The great Nazarene, it is declared, belonged to this Order, and he acknowledged that in his own time, his own country, and his own immediate neighborhood others, not of his following, were doing mighty works.

If Masters ever existed, when and why did they cease to exist? If "inspiration" ever flowed into the minds and hearts of men, when and why did the fountain run dry?

Ans.—This is but one of not a few inconsistencies in the "orthodox", but we are so habituated to them that they excite no attention until specifically pointed out. A dispassionate reader would probably say that the Biblical accounts of certain sages and teachers are substantially such as Theosophy gives of Masters, there being almost entire parallelism as to wisdom, goodness, phenomenal power, absence of self-seeeking, and direct relation to the Divine. The probable reason for the disappearance of Christian belief in Masters is the gradual triumph of the so-called doctrine of the Incarnation, viz. that Jesus was God manifested in flesh. If the Supreme Being actually took form as man and dwelt among men, so stupendous a fact must stand alone, absolutely without imitation or rivalry, and hence any historic characters resembling this must be dwarfed and brought within range, made as few as possible and accounted for as having specially received their gifts from Him. A circle of immediate attendants, supernaturally endowed by Him with powers to be used in establishing His mission, would be a fitting feature, yet only for a time, as multiplication of such would cheapen the conception and would also detract from their uniqueness as personal associates. So the evolving Christian doctrine recognized as "Apostles" the group around and selected by the Master, together with St. Paul who was supernaturally added by the Master after His own death, closing the list forever at that point. Even the distinct Scriptural application of the term "Apostle" to others, as in Acts xiv, 4 and 14, was not followed. It was necessary to confine Apostleship to such as had actually "seen the Lord". The conventional Christian conception of an Apostle differs therefore from a Theosophic Master in two respects: *first*, that the spiritual graces and phenomenal powers appertaining to the person were not an acquisition through self-effort during many lives of which that in the time of Christ was the culmination, but a supernatural investiture by and at the pleasure of Christ

Himself; *second*, that these men did not receive their office because of any fitness or moral claim or merit earned, but because of personal choice by Christ.

As a unique Incarnation required a unique Apostleship, stern jealousy arose as to any later personages reputed to be similarly endowed. They had to be regarded as spurious imitations. Apollonius of Tyana was thus disposed of by the theologians. Then the doctrine formed that "miracles" belonged solely to the Apostolic age, ceasing therewith. Lecky shows the real historic fact to be that the claim was far more extended afterwards, the number multiplying with the centuries. But the ecclesiastical theory, devised for a purpose and the reverse of fact, required denial of Masters, and texts as to Masters were summarily disposed of just as were texts as to Apostles.

All this does not mean intentional perversion. Indeed, it is impossible that a finished theory should first be consistently worked out and then all texts and facts be moulded into conformity with it. That is not the genesis of interpretation. The historic fact is that doctrine very gradually forms as new influences and needs come to the surface, and that opposing considerations are met and treated as exigencies arise. When doctrine is at last fixed, the answers to these considerations take fixed form also, and then, as new ones manifest, the answers to them are guided by the essential nature of the doctrine. It being assumed a certainty, there is also assumed the certainty that there must be some other interpretation of conflicting facts than a contradiction, whereupon ingenuity and an entirely honest zeal for what is supposed truth exert themselves on behalf of harmony. There may, of course, be disingenuousness, yet there may be only bigotry and narrowness, a partisan spirit, an incapacity to see both sides. No doubt this operated in obscuring and then obliterating the Scriptural testimony to Masters.

When the doctrine of Masters was once lost, and when Bible passages referring to them had acquired a wholly different meaning, the subject vanished from thought. If any one spoke of it he was naturally supposed an oddity or a heretic; if

he quoted texts, his interpretation seemed wild. There was no existing tradition which would give color to his renderings. When, then, a Theosophist now points out the Scriptural references to Masters, he has to allow for the actual state of things. It need not surprise him that the orthodox are blind to patent facts, nor should he marvel that they ignore the logical considerations stated in the last sentence of the Question; he should remember that they are destitute of the premises underlying those considerations. The argument, as such, in that sentence is irresistible. If Masters ever existed and if inspiration ever flowed, there is no possible reason why either should cease. The source is unchanged, the channels remain, the need persists, and the continuance of the outcome is therefore to be expected. Every element which had part in an early production of Masters has part still, and the same causes produce still the same results. And this perfectly valid reasoning is one of the forces which will in time effect a new exegesis of the Bible, and help to bring about a time when the Bible will not be a dead record of an exceptional past, but a living key to a normal present.

QUESTION CCLXXXV.

What is meant by the "Over-Soul"? To what human principles does it correspond?

K. H.—Emerson has an essay in his *First Series* called *The Over-Soul*, which has probably done more than anything else to make the term familiar to English readers. He identifies it with the spiritual element in all things. "The soul gives itself, alone, original, and pure, to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who on that condition gladly inhabits, leads, and speaks through it". . . . "The simplest person who in his integrity worships God becomes God; yet forever and ever the influx of his better and universal self is new and unsearchable." In Theosophical literature it is generally spoken of as *Alaya*, defined in the *Theosophical Glossary* as the Universal Soul. It is said there to be identical with *Akâsa* in

its mystic sense, and with Mûlaprakriti in its essence, as it is the basis or root of all things.

In the *Secret Doctrine*, I, 48, H. P. B. says: "Alaya is literally the 'Soul of the World' or Anima Mundi, the 'Over-Soul' of Emerson, and according to esoteric teaching it changes periodically its nature." That is, although eternal and changeless in its inner essence, it alters during the active life-period upon the lower planes, ours included. (And see the glossary to the *Voice of the Silence*, III, 8, p. 88.) For the doctrine of the esoteric schools see *Secret Doctrine*, I, 49 *et seq.*

QUESTION CCLXXXVI.

Are the statements in the 9th chapter of "Esoteric Buddhism" regarding the later incarnations of Buddha as Sankaracharya (sixty years after Buddha's death) and Tsong-ka-pa (born in the 14th century) correct? I do not remember anything by H. P. B. which confirms these very interesting statements.

W. Q. J.—The statement in *Esoteric Buddhism* referred to is not the first time that such a view has been given out, as for many, many years the assertion has been made in India and other Oriental countries that Buddha reincarnated in Sankaracharya for the purpose of making a reform in Hindu philosophy. From reading Mr. Sinnett's words it would seem that he is using the terms of the letters from the Adepts on which the book is founded, but that cannot be said certainly until he admits it or the letters themselves are published. I do not remember now any passage in which H. P. B. said anything about it, but other students may be able to find such. The same may be said as to Tsong-ka-pa. The doctrine of reïncarnations of an Avatar is clearly put in the Bhagavad Gita in the fourth chapter, thus: "And thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of virtue"; and so also is it given in many other of the old scriptures. As Buddha came to those who were outside the Vedic law, so it was natural at that time, a little later, he or

some one else should come to make a reform in Hindu Vedic philosophy. Whether both were the same souls is not very important, but it is quite evident that the soul of each was in every sense a "maha-atma," for the influence of Sankara is as much felt to this day in the Vedic philosophical schools as is that of Buddha outside of them. The coming and going of such highly advanced egos is always "by a secret path", as is the phrase, and generally curiosity is what brings out references on the point of identification, for did we know who any particular person was in another birth nothing much of value would be gained. Supposing it to be certain that Buddha and Sankara were one and the same soul, we gain nothing but some confusion, since much that one said will not harmonize on the surface with that said by the other, inasmuch as we know nothing of their secret reasons, and the systems given by each have many radical differences.

QUESTION CCLXXXVII.

In "Lucifer" for March, 1893, in Mrs. Besant's "Death—and After?" the victim of accident is described as having a worse fate than the suicide, if he (the victim of accident) be a sinful, sensual man. This seems unjust, though not difficult to imagine a suicide suffering in the other world. It also seems unjust that a sinful man should suffer any more because of an accident or sudden departure not caused by himself. Motive is everything. The suicide's motive was bad. The victim of accident had no motive. His inner nature was no worse than if he had lived out a long life of sin; probably not so bad. Furthermore, Mrs. Besant quotes an assertion that victims of accident wander about in gloom "till their death-hour comes". Then a person may die before his time comes? I had always supposed that a man's time had come whenever he died,—whether by accident or lingering disease. The above implies that there is a fixed time for everyone to die, but that that time is unfixed or upset by accident. Is that it?

Ans.—Take the last question first. One can hardly say that each man has assigned to him a definite date of death, which,

however, may be changed by casualty, for this would mean that a Divine decree could be set aside by a terrestrial accident. But one may very properly say that the condition of an individual,—his constitution, hereditary tendency, general health, normal vigor, etc., forecasts his probable length of years. The whole business of life-insurance is based upon this principle, for it is through probabilities as deduced from a vast mass of varied statistics that calculations and assessments become practicable. No one can arbitrarily assert of any individual that he is to die at such and such a time; but taking into account all attainable facts in his physique, temperament, and descent, there is a *presumption*, based upon large record of analogous cases, that he will have the average career belonging to the class of which he forms part. Upon this presumption thus reached is calculated his insurance premium, and the tabulated results in the business, coupled with the success of Companies in their operations, show that there is a general law of life which makes possible vital statistics. Hence if a man is stricken down by accident before the end of his normal term, we unhesitatingly speak of his death as "premature",—premature, that is, not as to an arbitrarily assigned demise, but as to the time which a person of his vital powers would naturally reach.

Now to go back. It is quite true that motive has much to do with destiny, even if not "everything". It is also true that there is no motive in a death by accident, although less true that a suicide's motive is necessarily bad, for in some cases it may be good, however misguided, as where a chronic invalid kills himself to avoid longer burdening his friends. But the vastly important factor of character must be considered in its bearings on the post-mortem state of suicides and the accidentally-dying.

Further. Like must be compared with like, the futures of the victim of accident and of the suicide when both are of about the same moral grade. It will not do to compare a sinful, sensual victim with a suicide not so except as to the one wrong act, nor a victim cut off young in sin with a sinner old and hardened. Evidently a victim of vile character must suffer more for his vileness than a suicide of less evil nature, and an old offender than a young one. Karma is just.

The question really is, whether a violent death has no other consequences than has a natural one, and, if so, what they are. Now it certainly seems reasonable that an abnormal entrance into the next life should result differently from a normal entrance. And this *must* be so if we regard death not as an act but as a process. If the separation of the individuality from the personality has stages, and if Nature has provided that these take place for defined purposes and through an assigned sequence, it appears inevitable that a divergence from the initial stage must affect the course of those later. It is not a purely moral matter, but one beginning in a physical matter and then drawing on consequences mental, moral, and spiritual, just as often happens in earth-life. When we examine into the actual train of results from an abnormal death, the exposition given by Mrs. Besant and by the higher authority whom she quotes appears both plausible and consistent. The sudden wrenching away of the outer case from its inner contents frees the latter for independent action, and the action must go on till its inherent vitality is exhausted. That vitality is still, in the case considered, fresh and strong, and it cannot be unaffected by its surroundings on the plane where it is then functioning. So come naturally to operate the very influences depicted by Mrs. Besant, more or less evil as the disembodied entity is sympathetic with them in character. If in earth-life it was affiliated with the low and the vile, why less so in another sphere which has only changed its *locale* and not its nature? And if unsatisfied desires caused torment here, why should they not there? Nor should we forget that the accidental death does not produce either demerit or the punishment due to it, for both would otherwise exist and Karmically blossom in a later incarnation, but simply gives opportunity for an immediate rather than a postponed retribution. And it is not improbable, Karma including every factor, that the suffering of a soul in such state counts in expiation as truly as if given here. Certainly we cannot believe that any soul suffers more than it deserves, and the mere scene of the suffering, or even its nature, need not affect the question of its correct amount. This must be just as true of an evil-liver suddenly thrust into Kama Loka as of a less of-

fender thrusting himself there with the sin of that act added to whatever other offenses had accumulated during his career.

QUESTION CCLXXXVIII.

Why did the Egyptians, whose priests were many of them advanced Adepts, teach the necessity of carefully preserving the bodies of the dead, while the advanced Theosophists of the present day advocate the rapid destruction of the body by means of cremation?

W. Q. J.—In asking a question why the Egyptians did this or another thing you expect too much of us. We really cannot know. And no matter why they did what they did with mummies, it would be no reason for or against what now is advanced by Theosophists and others. But cremation is not a thing the Theosophists proposed; it was proposed long before the T. S. was founded, and but little is said of it by Theosophists. But at the same time it is not known what was the real origin of making mummies, as the examples we have belong to very recent periods of the Egyptians, who must have existed many thousands of years before the times we can know of their history. It has been suggested very justly that the practice began with their Adept kings for reasons of their own, and that it came to be imitated afterwards. If this is so, then it would be natural for the kings to permit it among the people so as to create a greater security for their own mummies; for if there be mummies for all, no one will bother to look for any particular mummy for some special reason, whereas if only kings were known to be mummied, then later people might want to exhume and inspect them, for the early kings were thought by the people to be Adepts, as is evident from the records. But on all this we are as yet but making assumptions.

Ans.—The reason for mummification must as yet be speculative, since no inscriptions or documents have been discovered which state it. Various theories have been propounded, one by Mr. John M. Pryse having been published in *Lucifer* for September, 1893,

but no one can be other than conjectural, inasmuch as actual knowledge is wanting. But if Mr. Sinnett is right in his contention that the Great Pyramid was erected by Adept Kings 200,000 years ago, as also that it has been since submerged (*Transactions of the London Lodge No. 19*), it being quite certain that both Egyptian mummies and Egyptian records are far later, no sure traces of Adepts being found therein, it would appear that the era of Adept influence was much before the time of the mummies found in Egypt. Is there any evidence that mummification was enjoined by real Initiates? Even if the priesthood contained Initiates, embalming might not necessarily be of their institution. Nor, if it was, would it be thereby proved a desirable system for all ages, climates, and civilizations. The argument for cremation must be handled on its own merits, apart from ancient local practices, especially when the sanction to those practices cannot be demonstrated as from Masters,—certainly with our present light.

QUESTION CCLXXXIX.

How can we discern whether it is the divine conscience animating us and directing us in a certain direction, or the animal soul seeking release from seemingly unfavorable environments?

W. Q. J.—The divine conscience acts in all struggles for betterment, but clouded more or less in each by reason of education and habit of thought; hence it varies in brightness. It is not possible to make a hard-and-fast fixed rule for finding out what is the animating motive. If we are trying to get into a better state, it is for us to decide if that be simply and wholly selfish. All actions are surrounded by desire as the rust is round the polished metal or the smoke round the fire, but we must try. So if we fix for ourselves the rule that we will try to do the very best we can for others, we will generally be led right. If we rely on the higher self and aspire to be guided by it, we will be led to the right even if the road goes through pain, for sorrow and pain are necessary for purification of the soul. But if we wish to run away from an environment because

we do not like it and without trying to live in it while not of it, we are not altering ourselves but simply altering the circumstances, and may not always thereby gain anything.

Ans.—This is in effect asking "What is the test of Motive?" In human action motives are almost invariably mixed. So subtle and yet pervasive is the influence of selfhood that it tinctures nearly all the forces of the mind, not always in respect to supposed interests, but perhaps in prejudice, prepossession, preference. To so train judgment that it shall discern the actual, inherent merits of a cause, quite apart from and unaffected by any personal relations or sympathy, is one of the most difficult of exercises; yet it is the most indispensable to accuracy. Judgment as to external matters can never have validity while any personal predilections are permitted influence, for they inevitably deflect and distort. Yet even this is more practicable than cool dispassionateness when the self attempts to judge the self, since here the judge and the suitor are one and the same infirmities pervade both. Not only are subtle tendencies undetected, but self-love prompts to a favorable decision. Usually the creditable motives are the ones to force themselves to the front, the meaner or less worthy shrinking into the background and perhaps hiding altogether behind the others. To drag them out and face them requires skill. courage, and high principle.

The matter is further complicated because the instinct to better one's circumstances is quite proper in itself. It is implanted by Nature, and is the prompter to most of the energy which effectuates individual improvement, advance of social refinement and melioration, and the general progress of the race. The discouragement of individual enterprise means check to the betterment of society. And, indeed, every man is right in striving, by all proper means and with absence of methods injurious or unfair to others, to make the best of his abilities, opportunities, and situation. All are Karmic endowments; they express merit gained in preceding lives; and they would be useless if shelved or disregarded. They are also valuable assistances towards that uplifting of the general level which every true man feels as part of his mission. Discontent with existing

conditions is the necessary spur to the effort towards self-betterment involved, for if each man was entirely satisfied with his environment and had no wish for finer, no one would ever struggle and progress of the whole would be impossible. Just as doubt initiates movement from wrong doctrine into truth, so does discontent from poor surroundings into good. The aspiration is creditable in each case, there being no merit in satisfaction with what is inferior,—even, indeed, the reverse.

So, then, a desire for conditions more seemly, comfortable, agreeable, pleasurable is not unworthy, whether the "animal soul" prompts it or something else. What that prompter may be depends upon the existing conditions, the method of change, the conditions desired, and the reasons for desiring. The determination must begin with a careful analysis under these heads. If the conditions possessed and coveted are both of physical quality, or—at all events—unconnected with higher interests, and if both the reasons and the methods have to do with temporal happiness, it is quite certain that the stimulus is not from divine conscience. If all four are of distinctly spiritual quality, the opposite certainty is assured. Most cases, however, are more or less mixed, the discontent springing from both an unsatisfactory environment and an unsatisfying use of it. The moral nature and the physical nature may both be ill at ease. Just how far each is responsible, and just how legitimate is the unrest, perhaps one cannot in all cases determine. Yet there is one word which always reveals the inner spirit and tests the structure of motive—DUTY. If a man can truthfully affirm to himself that he would rather perform duty than acquire any pleasure or any boon, he cannot largely err in the determination of any problem. For the motive will not be mere satisfaction, however justifiable, or any improvement, however legitimate, but the accomplishing of that which, in the premises, he ought to do, personal preferences being altogether subordinate. And what can effectuate such sensitiveness to duty as the greatest boon to be coveted but that divine conscience which dominates the impulses, inspires them with earnestness, and will assuredly in time grant them illumination!